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STATEMENT READ TO MINING BOARD BY MICHAEL BROWN

The Escalante Valley is located in the southwest corner of Utah about 40 miles west of Cedar City and 40 miles north of St. George. The economy of this area has been built around agriculture since its early settlement with the main development of the underground water usage in the late 1940's and early 1950's. There is approximately 25,000 acres under cultivation with water from the underground basin, and an additional two to three thousand acres being irrigated from runoff waters from the Enterprise Reservoirs, Holt Canyon, New Castle Reservoir, and Pinto Creek.

The Escalante Valley is one of the most fertile and productive farming areas in the state, supporting a livelihood for approximately 150 farmers. The primary revenue crops are hay, grain, potatoes, and livestock. The market for these crops include the western states of Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and California. Sales of these crops are in the multi-million dollar range.

The Farm Bureau estimates the total agricultural impact on a local economy to be four times the gross production of that area.

The limiting factor on increasing irrigation acreage and production has been the limited availability of water. The water rights of the area were open to development until approximately 1950, at which time additional water allocations limited to acres and acre feet were closed. The closure of further water allocations and water rights has caused those existing rights to increase tremendously in value to such an extent that water rights are bought and sold independent of land. This has had the effect of making the land without water rights of little value. The reason for the closing of allocations was that the consumptive use by the farmers exceeded the natural recharge, lowering the water table at an approximate rate of 2 feet per year.

Each farmer in the area has his own independent irrigation system, usually pumping directly into a pressure system on his farm. As the water table has dropped, the farmers have gone to more efficient methods of water application. At the present time, it is estimated that 80 - 90% of the farms are irrigated by sprinkler systems. The individual nature of each irrigation system makes it impossible for the irrigators to utilize the surface water efficiently without duplicating a water system and pumping plant already in existance.

We, as farmers of this valley, feel that we are putting this precious resource to very beneficial use as we lower the water table in the process of crop production. We firmly believe that to allow any waste of this resource cannot be justified. The continual usage of the underground supply by the farmers will eventually expose the mineral resource without wasting the water supply.

It is our opinion that the law allowing mining operations to dewater to gain access to ore does not apply to our specific situations. Ordinarily, mining operations are located in mountainous areas high above the fertile farming and their dewatering procedures often supplements the agricultural areas below. Our situation is unique in the fact that the proposed mining operation is on the valley floor and does not supplement or compliment the agricultural neighborhood but rather is a detriment to their continued existence.

Ranchers Exploration and Development is proposing to dewater over a ten year period a mine that is located one mile west of the central farming area. Estimates vary as to the amount of dewatering required sufficient to be able to mine the ore. Ranchers propose in Phase III of their schedule to pump 40,500 gallons per minute. That's 9 wells at 4,500 gallons per minute each. This converts to 65,315 acre feet pumped on an annual basis. Putting this in perspective, the total acre feet pumped in the entire valley by the farmers on their 25,000 acres averages 80,000 acre feet annually. In 1979 that figure was 77,448.733. We feel as dependent on water as the farmers and local residents are, that any decline in the water table created by Ranchers will have serious economic consequences.

There are numerous economic consequences to an unwarranted depletion of our underground water.

Some would be:

a. Crop losses suffered mid-season due to the rapid decline in the water table caused by the dewatering process.

b. Costs to lower and/or drill deeper wells to compensate for the dropping table for agricultural and domestic wells.

c. Increased pumping costs involved in lifting the underground water from an increasing depth.

These consequences are relatively short term. We must also address ourselves to the long-term consequences to our farming community from Rancher's proposed program.

Many of the farmers now are second and third generation farmers. We must also attempt to envision what kind of circumstances we will leave our fourth and fifth generation farmers after Ranchers Exploration and Development is through with their 10 year program and have left the area.

The proposal by the mining company to recharge the water dewatered from the mine area would use existing flood channels and dikes that have been built strictly for flood control and the prevention of runoff from spilling onto the surrounding farmland. The channels and dikes have been reasonably effective in flood control, although history points out that several times in recent years they have not been adequate and serious flooding has occurred. If the mine company discharges their water into the flood channels as they propose, and we get a period of heavy runoff as we so frequently do in the spring, the resulting situation would be disastrous flooding. Ranchers engineers claim that the proposed recharge area will sufficiently absorb the continuous supply of water and not spill over the dikes and into the North Canal. It is very important to note that any water into the North Canal is rapidly evacuated from the area and offers very little or no recharge. It is our firm opinion, as local residents and observants of past runoff history, that their proposal is not completely realistic and their water will quickly overrun the recharge area to waste. The credibility of their engineering studies can be questioned as we compare this proposal to a similar proposal made by Anglo-American when they attempted to dewater the mine in 1969. At that time, their engineers suggested that the water may not even reach the end of the North Canal and would likely recharge itself before it reached the end. It was no surprise to the local residents to see the water at the end of the canal discharging into the wasteland only 24 hours after two pumps were started.

We as farmers, do not oppose the mining operation in general, just the method by which they plan to dewater. The mining operation could be a healthy boost to the local economy and could provide gainful employment for many local residents.

We must, however, keep in mind that our water is too valuable and too precious of a resource to be wasted in any manner or quantity. We would suggest that the mining officials again reevaluate alternative methods of mining the silver ore so that the mine and the farming operations might be compatible.